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ABSTRACT

In 1983-84, the Center for the Study of Community Colleges developed and field tested an instrument, the General Academic Assessment (GAA) student survey, to assess community college students' knowledge in several liberal arts areas, including the humanities. The GAA was completed by a sample of 8,024 students at four large, urban community college districts. The scores were cross tabulated by selected student characteristic variables (e.g., age, ethnicity, native language, and reason for attending college) and selected educational background variables (e.g., the number of college units already completed by the student, and the number of humanities courses the student had taken prior to the GAA test). In general, older students scored higher in the humanities than younger students. The native language of the student seemed to be a significant factor, with native English speakers scoring higher than non-native English speakers. Students attending the community college to satisfy a personal interest scored higher in humanities than those attending to advance an occupation or to transfer. There appeared to be a positive correlation between the number of semester hours completed and scores on the humanities section of the GAA, and, not surprisingly, there was a positive correlation between the number of humanities courses taken and the students' GAA humanities scores. (EJV)

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ERIC DIGEST

August 1984

STUDENT ASSESSMENT - HUMANITIES

In an effort to assess community college students' knowledge of the liberal arts, the Center for the Study of Community Colleges developed and field-tested a student survey and general academic assessment. This General Academic Assessment (GAA) has representative numbers of items in the humanities, sciences, social sciences, mathematics, and English usage. In addition, it contains such background items about the students as age, the number of college credits earned, educational and occupational aspirations, self-assessment of their skills, and the number of liberal-arts courses taken.

During 1983 and 1984, a sample of 8,824 students at four large urban community college districts (Los Angeles, Chicago, Miami-Dade, and St. Louis) completed the GAA instrument. The sample was obtained by taking every twentieth eligible class section in each of the districts' schedule of classes. Only sections with academic transfer-credits were eligible; students taking remedial classes, vocational-technical classes, adult education, or community services courses exclusively were not included.

This ERIC digest examines how well the students did on the humanities portion of the GAA. The nature of the humanities test items is first discussed, followed by a series of tables that detail scores by ethnicity, age, and educational background.

Test items in the humanities section of the GAA assess student knowledge of art, music, drama and literature as well as student comprehension of philosophical concepts. Examples are provided below.

According to existentialists, the human being is forced to accept responsibility for:
(A) His neighbors
(B) Original sin
(C) Positive reinforcement
(D) His good and his bad luck
(E) His choices

Which composer is best known for his waltzes?
(A) Bach
(B) Beethoven
(C) Brahms
(D) Wagner
(E) Strauss

The items were provided by the Educational Testing Service and Miami-Dade and selected by a panel of staff members from community colleges in Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles, Miami, Phoenix, and St. Louis. A total of 57 items in the humanities was used on the five forms of the GAA.

Scores on the humanities section were aggregated and converted to ten-point scale scores.

In the following tables, the GAA scores are cross tabulated by selected Student Characteristic variables and selected Educational background variables. Student characteristics encompass age, ethnicity, native language, and reason for attending college; Educational background variables include the number of college units already completed by the student, and the number of humanities courses that the student has taken prior to the GAA test. Each table shows, in rank order, the mean humanities score on a scale of 1 to 10.

I. GAA Scores Cross Tabulated by Student Characteristics

A. Mean Scores by Student Age

In general, older students scored higher in the humanities section than did younger students.

Student Age	Mean	Number
Over 50	4.08	176
41 - 50	4.07	306
31 - 40	3.75	896
21 - 30	3.29	3,245
20 or less	3.19	3,215

B. Mean Scores by Whether or not English is the Native Language

The native language of the student seems to be a significant factor. Even when examined by ethnic group, native English speakers scored higher than non-native English speakers. The rate of difference between Blacks and Asians is revealed to be about the same.

Ethnic Group	Mean/Yes	N	Mean/No	N	Differential
Asian	2.93	208	1.97	549	.96
Black	2.75	1,894	1.91	111	.84
Hispanic	3.29	599	2.82	817	.47
White	4.26	3,827	3.26	265	1.00
Other	3.46	223	2.26	100	1.20

C. Mean Scores by Reason for Attending College

Students attend community colleges for a variety of reasons. Those attending to satisfy a personal interest scored higher in the humanities than those advancing in an occupation or intending to transfer.

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Reason for Attending	Mean	Number
Personal Interest	4.25	568
Advance in Occupation	3.37	702
Transfer	3.32	4,453
Enter an Occupation	3.16	2,139

The GAA also revealed that students aspiring to careers in the applied arts scored highest of any stated career goal with a score of 3.98.

D. Mean Scores by Self-Assessment of Ability to Understand the Arts

Students taking the GAA were asked to rate their own ability to understand art, classical music, and drama as compared to other students at their college. Those who rated themselves highly also scored high on the humanities section of the GAA.

Rating	Mean	Number
Excellent	4.22	1,440
Good	3.48	3,066
Fair	2.99	2,601
Poor	2.66	822
Entire Population	3.37	7,929

II. GAA Scores Cross Tabulated by Educational Background

A. Mean Scores by Number of Completed College Units

There appears to be a positive correlation between the number of semester hours completed and scores on the humanities section of the GAA.

Number of Units Completed	Mean	Number
60 or more	4.24	1,265
45 - 59	3.54	1,055
30 - 44	3.31	1,396
15 - 29	3.13	1,635
0 - 14	3.02	2,213
Entire Population	3.38	7,564

B. Mean Scores by Number of Humanities Courses

Not surprisingly, there was a positive correlation between the number of humanities courses taken and the students' GAA humanities scores.

No. of Humanities Courses	Mean	Number
Three or more	4.31	1,732
Two courses	3.44	1,368
One Course	3.15	1,749
None	2.88	2,619
Entire Population	3.38	7,468

When examined by ethnic group, the rate of gain for Blacks is second only to that for Whites.

Ethnic Group	Mean (No courses)	N	Mean (3 or more courses)	N	Differential
Asian	2.83	261	3.01	147	.98
Black	2.39	724	3.42	312	1.03
Hispanic	2.74	437	3.57	283	.83
White	3.53	1,852	5.17	857	1.64
Other	2.78	88	3.63	89	.85

The GAA is meant to assess students' knowledge of the liberal arts in community colleges. The humanities section, as well as the others, was designed specifically to assess the learning of cohorts of students, not individual students. The data from the GAA will be used as a tool to aid in program planning, curricular modifications, and to gauge institutional outcomes. More information about the GAA may be obtained from:

Center for the Study of Community Colleges
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1047 Gayley Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90024

Riley, Michelle. The Community College General Academic Assessment: Los Angeles District, 1983. Los Angeles: Center for the Study of Community Colleges, 1984.
ED number not yet assigned.

Riley, Michelle. The Community College General Academic Assessment: Miami-Dade Community College District, 1983. Los Angeles: Center for the Study of Community Colleges, 1984.
ED number not yet assigned.

ERIC Digests examining other sections of the GAA are available from the ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges; 8118 Math Sciences Building; UCLA; Los Angeles, California 90024.

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